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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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# Unprecedented Times

## *Virus, Social Issues Among Gene Smith's, Ohio State's Top Priorities*

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Gene Smith has seen a lot in his 15 years as the athletic director at Ohio State, but he's admittedly never had to deal with anything like the current state of affairs.

In just the last four months alone, the NCAA canceled all spring sports in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and implemented a lengthy recruiting dead period; students returned home and finished their courses online; nationwide protests began after a black man was killed by a white police officer, which prompted athletes and coaches to speak out against racial and social injustice in America; and schools started cutting athletic programs due to budgetary concerns, all while a new football season quickly approaches.

Though Ohio State's future – and the future of college athletics as a whole – hangs in the balance, Smith granted Buckeyes Sports Bulletin an exclusive remote interview on July 6 in which he openly discussed these unprecedented times, reflected on the year that was and much more.

**BSB: Things seem to change almost daily, but as of today, how do you feel about the chances of a football season happening?**

Smith: "I just don't know yet. As a conference, we're continuing to have discussions. You just have to wait and see how the virus continues to be managed. We'll hopefully have more clarity as we get through July."

**BSB: Along those same lines, you've previously mentioned the possibility of a reduced capacity in Ohio Stadium. How do you put that into effect?**



**THE INTERVIEW ISSUE**

ANDREW LIND

**UNENVIABLE POSITION** – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith has been tasked with leading the program through the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic while also showing support for his student-athletes amid the nationwide protests against racial inequality.

Smith: "We're going to follow the CDC guidelines, and if we have an opportunity to have people, if we have an opportunity to play, we're going to have to provide six feet of social distancing and so we're probably in that 20,000-people range. The virus has gotten worse in a lot of parts of our country, as you well know, and we have spikes right now in Ohio, so I don't think it's going to get better to the point where the CDC could loosen the guidelines.

"Every person will have seat assignments, so if you have 20,000 and a good portion of our students in a 100,000-seat stadium, it will be a lot easier to manage. We're so used to seeing our stadium with 100,000 people, and everybody is like, 'Oh my god, how are you going to manage 20,000?' Well, 20,000 is like a basketball game in the 'Shoe right now. I won't say it's easier, but it's easier than what people would imagine. We'll be able to manage that because we'll be so spaced out.

"If we were in a situation where the virus was under control and the CDC relaxed the guidelines, then we might have more challenges if we had more people trying to create whatever the social distancing number would be. With the six feet, it won't be as hard as people think."

**BSB: Of that reduced capacity, who would get first dibs? Would it be students, season ticket holders and so on?**

Smith: "We're just not there yet."

**BSB: Do you consider possibly raising prices of tickets to offset the lack of attendance?**

Smith: "We're not doing that. Whatever the current prices are is what we adhere to. We've had a number of people who ordered season tickets at the price that was announced, and we will honor that. We obviously have to refund quite a few, but we're not (raising prices). We're just waiting to see what decisions get made, and we'll build our budget up from there."

**BSB: How do you make sure to monitor the people who do attend the games to make sure they're not spreading the virus? Will there be checks and things like that?**

Smith: "You know, from an operations standpoint, we're not ready to talk about those things yet. I apologize. We're just not there. The reality is we are working on a plan, being tolerant and patient because this thing keeps changing and keeps evolving. What we've decided to do was to wait until our conference makes a decision on if we're going to play and what it will look like, and then we'll put in place our operational plans.

"We have a great team of people. We know whatever the model is, we'll be able to come up with a plan. It's kind of like

# Smith Reflects On Day's First Year As Head Coach

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the media in our press box, for example. We know we can handle that really quickly with the new regulations, so we're not focused a whole lot on that right now."

**BSB: Upon their return to campus, student-athletes were asked to sign a pledge, acknowledging their risk of participating amid the coronavirus pandemic. If it's not a legal document, what was the motivation behind having them sign it?**

Smith: "It was to make them make a commitment to themselves and their teammates. We feel comfortable and confident when they're with us in the weight room or out on the field. Our environment is clean and we're going to make sure that it's physically distanced. When they leave the Woody (Hayes Athletic Center), we're going to make sure they have their masks on and are physically distanced. But then they leave us, and so we wanted them to understand this is serious. You have to make a commitment to follow these guidelines. It's a team pledge, and that's what we wanted to do.

"To put it in writing. I've read it, I know what I need to do and I'm going to commit myself to when I'm in my apartment that I'm physically distancing or wearing my mask out of it and washing my hands." All of those types of things. It's one thing to read it and sign it as opposed to hearing it on a Zoom

call. You're making a pledge to yourself and each other that you're going to follow the protocols that our experts say are needed to protect yourself and to protect your teammates and anybody else around you."

**BSB: People in the media made the assumption that it was a legal document. Did you expect that kind of pushback?**

Smith: "Not to the level it got to. We intentionally made it so it wasn't a legal document. We have waivers. I was talking to our lawyer after people started saying it was a liability waiver, and I said, 'Wait a minute. What am I missing here?' And she said, 'Well, they didn't read it.' And she was right. We have waivers of liability, and this isn't even close to the ballpark of what we use for waivers of liability. Student-athletes can't and won't lose their scholarships, and we'll take care of them medically. It says that right in there.

"At the end of the day, that is not something we would even think would stand up in the court of law. It's disappointing that people took it that way, but we anticipated it because we're Ohio State. There's a void here, too, and the media is looking for something to talk about. Somebody else had a stronger document, I think it was SMU. We thought some people would say some things but not to that level."

**BSB: During this process, schools have shared their testing results. They haven't been saying which players, but they've said X number of players have**

**tested positive. Ohio State is not doing that, though. How come?**

Smith: "That's more of the corners of identifying the player. The institution, legal and everyone else involved took the position that we want to protect the individual player, and our people are so rabid about us and they'll do everything they can to find out who that player is. If there's someone positive, you know that player is on social media and in the public, so the solution was to mitigate that opportunity.

"If a young person says that they tested positive, that's their business. That's their right. It's kind of like during the football season if somebody has an injury and they say they're out because of an ACL tear, that's their right. That's not our right. I know there are people who don't believe that's the right thing to do, but from a legal point of view, that's the position we took."

**BSB: The virus has obviously shifted the way people go about their daily business. What was a normal day like for you during the last few months?**

Smith: "It's really been challenging. Fortunately, technology has helped us quite a bit. Every single day since March, at least in the beginning, the athletic directors in the Big Ten had morning calls. Now we're down to five days a week, talking about different models, different structures, listening to medical experts. (Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren) put together a medical task force, so we are constantly getting education. Now all these new tests are emerging, so we're getting educated on that.

"We also had Zoom calls with our coaches almost weekly up until recently. I've been on Zoom calls with parents and some phone calls with athletes because some coaches wanted me to do that. We've been doing a lot of planning. Microsoft Teams has been used quite a bit with some of our stuff, so we've been doing a lot of planning with our coaches, primarily because there's been so much uncertainty. Early on, it was more about rules and regulations. Since you couldn't recruit anymore, what could you do virtually? Can you have virtual camps? All those types of things, so we were pretty busy. It's slowed up a little bit right now because it's normal vacation time for people."

**BSB: The virus hit in the middle of spring practice. So how do you feel head coach Ryan Day has handled these unprecedented times?**

Smith: "He's done well. We were a little bit fortunate in this challenge because we were on spring break when this hit. We were basically telling people not to come back to campus. It was a little different than a lot of places. I think he's handled it well. As you've seen, Ryan is a great communicator and always asking the right questions. He's been a leader in our league around certain topics,

and he's done exceptionally well. One thing we've always talked about with players and facilities is to make sure we overcommunicate. He was doing that early on. How can we make sure, since they're at home, we can communicate? What can we do for the student-athletes relative to workouts? What can we do relative to nutrition?

"He's always worried about making sure they had available to them whatever we could provide. We were, as a conference, always driving a lot of decisions with NCAA legislation as a result of the feedback we've gotten from the coaches, particularly from Ryan. He's done an excellent job."

**BSB: The interesting thing about the players being at home is that you're relying on them to do what they say they are, and that's not something that necessarily exists when you're in the Woody. How do you think that challenges the coaching staff?**

Smith: "That's big time. Early on, you didn't have all the information as a position coach or a head coach, but you're just talking to them about being safe. But then we started to get feedback from the players. What can we do from a nutritional point of view? Can we send them anything from an equipment point of view, like the rubber bands and the rollers and things of that nature?"

"Over time, it got to a point where we knew what we needed to do, but then Ryan also did a great job of including the parents. You're at home with your parents, so they're a part of making sure their son did what they needed to do. They want to see them have an opportunity to come back, so it was a family focus. You didn't want to set up a situation where you monitor them, but you want to educate and trust them. You know our kids, we have very mature kids. We trust them. We got a lot of feedback from them, so it's worked exceptionally well for us."

**BSB: Shifting to the on-field play, Day led the program to a Big Ten title and College Football Playoff in just his first season as head coach. Did he meet or exceed your expectations?**

Smith: "He exceeded them in every single way. I knew his football IQ was very high, but the way he managed the season from a team point of view, managed the kids, learning how to manage his entire staff and entire support staff. A lot of people tend to forget he doesn't just have assistant coaches, he's got a support staff around that program that are very important to manage on a daily basis, and he's done an excellent job in that space.

"He's a great communicator. He's inquisitive and if he doesn't know something, he always asks. That's really helpful. He doesn't just try to make decisions on the fly, and he's exceeded my expectations in so many different ways. A lot of coaches would have crashed and burned with the Chase Young

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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: GENE SMITH

challenge that we had and when we had it. He just embraced the challenge and helped compliance, Chase and the family get to a spot that allowed him to come back and play and take the high road. He did a really great job."

**BSB: The season came to an unfortunate end with the controversial loss to Clemson. You were pretty outspoken after the game, particularly when it came to the overturned fumble call that resulted in a go-ahead touchdown. Seven months later, how much does that still sting?**

Smith: "It still stings. I have no problem losing to a team that is better than you. I have no problem losing to a team when you don't execute or make enough mistakes and you ultimately deserve to lose. I was highly disappointed that we should have had the opportunity to win that game, but a couple opportunities were taken away. I still hurt for the players because who knows how it would have ended up after that. At the end of the day, that would have positioned us and the players to win that game. I still hurt from it. Not personally because I've been through it a million times, but the players deserved an opportunity to finish that game without the challenges they faced in it."

**BSB: The defense was much improved under Jeff Hafley last season, so much so that he's now the head coach at Boston College. Did you anticipate that he'd have that kind of impact and those kind of opportunities after just one season?**

Smith: "I didn't have that crystal ball, but as he coached in the preseason and early games, I realized how special he was. Not just with the players and the schemes they ultimately ran, but how he worked with other people. He's just a great personality. He's been around the block and seen a lot, so I knew he had the potential to be a head coach one day. I didn't know it would happen that fast, but he's a talented man."

**BSB: We're all quite familiar with his replacement, Kerry Coombs, given his previous stint with the program. What is it about Kerry that makes you believe there won't be a drop-off in play from the defense this fall?**

Smith: "We're the total sum of our experiences in life, and he's had the experience at the NFL level with some unbelievable talent and in a different game. Jeff had that. He'll have the opportunity to bring that experience to the team that he didn't have before. I think our kids will respond to that. We're talented but we're lacking some experience back there, but we have good leadership and a number of guys back. Kerry is a good teacher. He was a good teacher before, and that hasn't changed. He's high energy, which is a huge positive, so I think we'll be fine."

**BSB: You mentioned Young, who played a significant role in the defensive improvement by setting the school record for sacks last season and being**

**invited to the Heisman Trophy ceremony. Where would you say his season ranked among the all-time greats?**

Smith: "What a season. He put so much into it, and he would have more if he wasn't double- and triple-teamed at times. He had a heck of a season, and I'm so proud of him. I'm glad he was picked where he was picked and as high as he was picked. He'll do exceptionally well at the next level, and I'm proud of the season he had."

**BSB: There was a bit of a rough patch toward the end of the year, when Young was suspended for two games for accepting a loan from a family friend. When it was first brought to your attention, did you think there was a chance the team would be missing its best defensive player for the rest of the season?**

Smith: "Oh, sure. I thought it could have gone both ways. It could have been an NCAA decision or it could have been his decision. He had the opportunity to say, 'I'm not going to go through this.' He could have decided to go work out and go pro. He chose to share the information with our compliance staff and gave himself an opportunity to come back. I told his parents and him to at least allow us (to determine) what the suspension would be and then he could still decide to go pro or come back. He definitely got a chance to leave in either scenario, but he chose to come back, which I thought said a lot about him."

**BSB: Though under different circumstances, that would have been similar to when Nick Bosa decided he was going to focus his efforts on going pro vs. coming back from injury in 2018. When that happens, do you just have to support the player one way or the other, even if it might not benefit the school?**

Smith: "No question. I've always been that way. That's the right thing to do. That's a family decision and a player's decision, and we'd never get in the way of that. Nick's was different since it was an injury, and there were significant risks in him coming back, so I get it. That's a tough call. You respect the family, the player and their rationale. We're trying to position young people to have the opportunity to do what they want to do when they leave us. If their circumstances require them to leave earlier than others, I've always believed you have to support the family."

**BSB: On offense, the Buckeyes greatly benefited from the transfer of quarterback Justin Fields. Does his success skew your feelings toward the transfer portal, and by contrast, what challenges do you feel still remain with that process?**

Smith: "I've always felt student-athletes should have the opportunity to transfer for whatever reason. I wasn't a big believer in the portal and how it was structured, and I still believe there are some challenges with it. But my base support of providing student-athletes an opportunity to transfer and be immediately eligible one time hasn't

changed. I just think the process of the portal has to continue to improve. You need to give it time and look back and say, 'This needs to be tweaked,' but I've been very supportive of the transfer part."

**BSB: Former head coach Urban Meyer has been in his role as an assistant athletic director for more than a year now. How do you feel he's done in that role, and do you believe he's still happy doing that instead of coaching?**

Smith: "I'm sure he misses coaching. He and I haven't talked about that piece for a while now. We're beyond it. I'm sure he misses it like anyone that's performed at his level, but he's done a great job for us in the job that we've asked him to do. He's very responsive, and he has a myriad of responsibilities. His impact on our staff, the student-athletes, the programs he's run for us and the donors has been highly positive. I really feel good about his contribution to our team."

**BSB: After a two-year stint on the playoff committee, you stepped down in February 2019 to lend your support to a first-year head coach and because you were notably displeased with how the committee was applying criteria. How was it to be on the outside of that**

**committee last year, and do you feel anything changed as a result of your departure?**

Smith: "That's a good question. I haven't thought about that one. I felt really good being out of that. I miss being in the room with my colleagues. That's something that most people don't understand. There's a beauty of being in the room and talking about football at that level. I had the same experience on the basketball committee, and I miss that. But I really felt comfortable that I was here for Ryan."

"The Chase situation was the perfect example. I was here the whole time. I wasn't leaving Sunday and coming back Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. I needed to be here and I felt good about that. I also felt good that Gary Barta, my colleague from Iowa, was in the room and that he could talk about Ohio State pretty freely. I don't know that much has changed in that perspective, but those are two things from my seat that were highly advantageous."

**BSB: The biggest end-of-season debate was about which undefeated team should be No. 1, Ohio State or**

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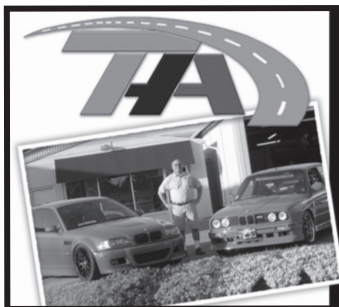
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# Smith Looking Forward To Tilts With Alabama

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**LSU. Who did you believe deserved that spot and the easier matchup with No. 4 Oklahoma?**

Smith: "Well, that's probably why I'm not in the room because I would have said Ohio State. Statistically, I haven't thought about that and I'd have to go back and look at the stats. One of the things you have to be objective about in that room is when you have two teams that are that close, you have to go back and look at offensive and defensive efficiency, how they perform on fourth down, all those types of things. There are a myriad of stats that would have taken me to an objective view. I didn't look at those things, so I can't really answer that question without looking at all of those indicators that said this team deserved the right to be No. 1 because they performed exceptionally well in these categories."

**BSB: Had the Buckeyes gotten past Clemson, they would have faced LSU and quarterback Joe Burrow. Would it have been difficult to root against him, since he used to play at Ohio State?**

Smith: "You love Joe. He's just an unbelievable human being. But in that situation, no. I would be rooting for Ohio State hands down. I would hope that he would have a decent game, but not too good of a game. It wouldn't have been that hard for me. They were really good. It would have been an interesting matchup."

**BSB: The college landscape is changing with student-athletes soon being able to profit off of their name, image and likeness. Do you think something like that will only further set Ohio State apart?**

Smith: "I think when NLI comes into play, we're going to be positioned well. I think our

student-athletes will have an opportunity to monetize their name, image and likeness at Ohio State better than other places. That's just reality. I think there will be more changes down the road that will occur that will allow us to help our athletes even more. That gives us an advantage, and that's the big concern around that issue. Our history, tradition and performance of our coaches is always going to give us an edge over other schools.

"Our coaches, compliance and support staff are trying to help our student-athletes understand their persona. Their brand is important for them to manage for the next level, be that going to work at Morgan Stanley Chase or going pro or whatever it is. You are making good decisions for yourself or positioning yourself from a branding point of view so that you can have the opportunity to realize the dreams you want to have after college. We've been educating them for a long time on that, on how to manage themselves appropriately on social media. I think our kids get that, so I think when the NIL comes into play, they'll be well-positioned to take advantage of that."

**BSB: Ohio State recently announced a home-and-home series with Alabama for 2027 and 2028. Why is it so important to get a big-time game like that on the docket?**

Smith: "When I was hired, Andy (Geiger) told me we had always done that, and I just wanted to continue that. I think our kids want, first and foremost, to play in those games and play those opponents. Fans want to see those games. I think it helps us be ready for the Big Ten. I think it helps us be ready for the postseason, whatever opportunity we have. Some of the contests allow us to go into geographies where Buckeyes historically haven't seen us before. When we went to Washington, when we went to Cal,

when we went to Texas, where there are a large number of fans and alums. Sometimes, we can do that. Sometimes, we can't. But I think it's important to play those big games."

**BSB: You mentioned in our interview last year that your contract runs through June 2022, but you'll stay at Ohio State as long as they'll have you and so long as your wife lets you. Do you see a scenario in which you'll be the athletic director when the Crimson Tide come to town?**

Smith: (laughs) "I don't think so. I doubt that one. I'm pretty sure I won't be the guy. I hope that I have the opportunity to come to the game. There are games on our future schedule that I'm hoping to be a fan in the stands, and Alabama is one of them. I'm very hopeful that I have that opportunity."

**BSB: Shifting gears, you released a statement voicing your – and the Ohio State athletic department's – support for the Black Lives Matter movement amid the nationwide protests following George Floyd's death. Why do you believe that was important?**

Smith: "I personally believe in the movement, having the life I've had as an African-American growing up, and then going into this business and having all the experiences that I've had. I think that this is a time where there is some real opportunity for change. I've seen different times in our history where protests have occurred and very little changed. I think this one is different. I think we have a chance for some systemic change, so I think it's important for us as an athletic department to make a statement that, first and foremost, supports our student-athletes. They need to hear that. And, as people of influence, we need to see if we can influence the change that needs to be made. I think it's important that when we have an opportunity

to eliminate hate, to have leadership look at what structural changes need to occur in our society – be it in the police department, in real estate or just economic opportunities – we need to take that stance. While we aren't the ones who can actually make it happen, we want to let people know we are supportive of them."

**BSB: One thing that's interesting about the world we live in today is that athletes have a bigger platform than they've ever had, and we've seen current players and prospective student-athletes use that to speak out against racism and inequality, among other things. How do you feel about that?**

Smith: "I just love it. I've always told our athletes that whatever they do, make sure it's an informed effort. That it's not just emotional. Whatever statement you make, somebody is going to ask you a question about it, so make sure that you have the answer. It's not something that's just willy-nilly and uninformed. What's beautiful is someone like (basketball Buckeye) Seth Towns, who hasn't played for us yet, just making informed comments. It's just who he is. I love what our athletes have done with this movement."

"People don't recall, but I remember our hockey players back in the day wanted to support the You Can Play project, supporting the LGBTQ+ community. They came to us and asked if they could do it, and I said, 'Sure, you can do it. Let's talk about your messaging and how it's going to work.' I was just so proud of them. Or the mental health issues, when that became something that we all needed to talk about. We wanted our student-athletes to embrace our sports psychologists and get help. I just remember all of those conversations, and it was just so cool. It was, 'Let's just make sure you talk about it the right way.' I love how our student-athletes and coaches are talking about it. They're thoughtful and rational and prudent. It makes sense."

**BSB: On another note, the college basketball season came to an abrupt end amid the coronavirus outbreak. How disappointed were you for the Ohio**

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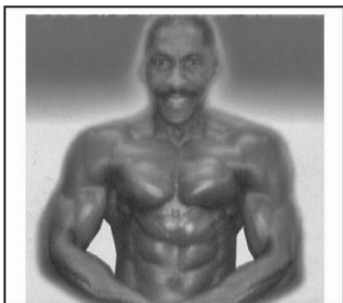


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THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: GENE SMITH

**State basketball teams, both men and women, as they seemed to be playing their best heading into their respective tournaments?**

Smith: "I was extremely disappointed. There were a lot of things that piled up that were painful for a lot of reasons, but that one was the top of the pyramid. Our league was No. 1 in the country, and we would have gotten a large number of teams into the tournament. But our kids were playing great."

"Chris (Holtmann) is such a great teacher. He had them playing great. They accepted their roles and you could see the chemistry and cohesiveness. All of us could just tell that this team had a good chance to make a run. I thought we would have done well in the Big Ten tournament. I don't know that we would have won it, but we would have done well. And then it was just a matter of which bracket we got in. If we got a good draw, this team could have gone deep. How far, who knows? But they had positioned themselves to go deep, and that really, really hurt. There are so many different pain points, but that one really hurt."

**BSB: Since the end of the season, both programs have been hit hard by transfers. Why do you think that is?**

Smith: "Every case is different. We talked a little bit about each kid, so it's hard to look at them in the aggregate because I know each one's case. You should be respectful of a young person's decision and rationale. You may not necessarily agree with it, but you respect it and you move on."

"If you look at basketball and the transfer scenario over our history, basketball has had this challenge for a long time. It goes back to AAU ball and high school, where families are moving their sons and daughters around just to be on different teams. The culture and the behavior is, 'I just want to play somewhere in a different system and be the for-sure No. 1,' so they just transfer. It's a different attitude that you have to get used to. I tell our coaches to make sure to do a good job getting to know the kid, the family, the influencer and do our best to help them see why they should be at Ohio State. It's just the way it's going to happen and going to be."

**BSB: The most publicized transfer was point guard D.J. Carton, who cited his mental health as the main reason for his departure. What kind of support did he receive from the athletic department in that situation?**

Smith: "You just, again, look at each case differently and make sure the young person has what they need. D.J. was a great young man, but he needed help. That's why we gave him the space to go home and provided sports psychologists for him. At the end of the day, he just needed a different environment to be able to perform and deal with his personal challenge, so you respect it. You try and figure out what the issue is with that young person in whatever sport they're in and make sure you give them support."

"I've always said to our coaches that kids

sometime need a different environment to be successful. We've done a great job of recruiting, but they just may need to be somewhere else. Don't take it personally. We gave them everything that we could, but they just needed a different formula. Let them go."

**BSB: Jumping topics again, how did the virus impact the construction of various athletic facilities on campus?**

Smith: "You know, we were pretty fortunate in that we were already in construction with the Ty Tucker Tennis Center and that the money had already been raised. That's on track to be completed this fall, in September or October. It didn't hurt us from that perspective. Lacrosse fundraising is still going on. What's interesting is that fundraising is still pretty good. There are a lot of industries that are doing well. We did push it back, though, to when we would ultimately take it to the board. That will probably be next year. But from a fundraising point of view, it's going well."

**BSB: Ohio State opened the Covelli Center last year to rave reviews. How do you feel the building functioned in its first year of use?**

Smith: "It went well. I'm proud of our team. For volleyball, we built it to accommodate that operation because the crowds are different. We knew with wrestling, we'd probably fill it up a few times, which we did. It worked better than we thought, especially the stage in the middle of the floor. And then for women's gymnastics, we had an apparatus that we had to bring in, so our design team did a good job with it. It worked well with concessions and parking. We learned a lot after one year, but it worked well."

**BSB: I know you had bigger plans for it, too, with The Basketball Tournament that was supposed to be held there and then got moved to Nationwide Arena due to the pandemic.**

Smith: "That hurt. We really wanted the TBT. That would have been really cool. We thought the seating, the environment, the parking and all that would have been awesome. That was hard for us to give that up, but hopefully down the road, we'll have the opportunity to bring that back. We also want to have small concerts in there. That facility will have multiple purposes as we hopefully get this virus behind us. It will come to life in a lot of different ways."

**BSB: Speaking of bringing something back, Ohio State hosted games in each of the last two seasons at St. John Arena, but that was not on the schedule for this season. Are there any plans to return to the venue in the future, or were those just rare, special occasions?**

Smith: "I think it was just a special occasion. I doubt we'll go back. I just don't see it. You know, this year I think we have 16 home games. In the years we've had 19, 20 or 21 home games, it's easier to take one over there, but we're not going to be able to do that when we have 18 or less. I don't see that. We made a decision to play in some of these

big shootouts, the CBS Sports Classic and we're going to (the Battle 4) Atlantis in the Bahamas this year, so when we're playing in these big events, it makes it very difficult to go back to when we're playing 19, 20, 21 home games. We need at least 18 home games in the Schott if we can get them, so it's going to be very hard for us to go over to St. John. We did take a hit when we went over there last year, and I just can't do that again."

**BSB: Along those same lines, the pandemic will obviously have a far-reaching financial impact on Ohio State, but how does it impact the Olympic sports in particular?**

Smith: "We don't know yet the total depth of the impact. Everyone is tightening their belts, and we'll talk about this publicly later, probably in August when we have clarity. But, at the end of the day, everyone is being smart and being frugal. We've done some reductions here and there, but at this point in time, we're just waiting until we make our football decision, get into August and have more clarity."

"The coaches have done a good job of tightening their budgets, but keep in mind that we have expenditure savings because we didn't have spring sports. We didn't have baseball games, softball games and those operations, so those were significant savings for us. We feel good about how our Olympic sports have done, and now we just have to wait and see what we look like in August."

**BSB: Being in the midst of everything, I'm sure it's hard to look at it from this standpoint, but have you had the chance to step back and think about how unique the current situation is?**

Smith: "I haven't thought about that, but this is definitely the most challenging and unique year we've ever had in collegiate athletics. The decisions in what we do now will be so important for our student-athletes. They'll have to live with that for the rest of their lives. When you put the virus and social justice issues, there will be a time when you look back later in life and say, 'Oh my god, that's unbelievable what occurred in 2020.'"

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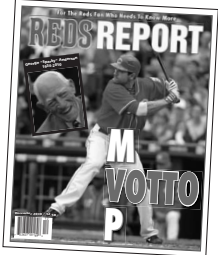
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